

A

V

COMMUNICATION

TO THE

MAYOR OF NEW YORK

IN REGARD TO THE

OFFICIAL CHARITIES OF THE CITY,

FROM

THEODORE ROOSEVELT,
JOSEPHINE SHAW LOWELL,
EDWARD C. DONNELLY,

Com'rs of the State Board of Charities.

ALBANY, N. Y.:

JOEL MUNSELL, PRINTER.

1877.

To the Honorable Smith Ely Jr.,

Mayor of New York,

SIR :

We feel that it is our duty to protest against the estimate of expenses of the department of Public Charities and Correction for the year 1878.

We have frequently pressed upon the attention of the Commissioners the dangerously overcrowded condition of the Lunatic Asylum on Blackwell's Island and had anticipated from them a request to the Board of Apportionment for an appropriation to buy a farm, upon which inexpensive buildings for the Chronic Insane could be erected, but of this no mention is made in their estimate.

The Medical Faculty of Bellevue Hospital have represented to the Commissioners the necessity of building two surgical pavilions connected with that hospital. To this suggestion no attention is paid.

In connection with these and other omissions in the estimate of the Commissioners of Public Charities and Correction we beg to lay before you, as the responsible head of the city of New York, a report on the charitable institutions under their charge which we have visited in the performance of our duty as Commissioners of the State Board of Charities.

In addition to the results of our own observation, we shall give extracts from reports which have been made by others from time to time during the past year in regard to these institutions. It is unnecessary to say that we shall dwell especially upon the evils which exist in them,

as our object is to remedy these through your means, although we fully appreciate the many improvements which have already been made by the present Commissioners of Public Charities and Correction.

BELLEVUE HOSPITAL.

The fifth annual report of the "Visiting Committee for Bellevue and other Public Hospitals" opens as follows :

"It is now five years since this committee began to visit the public hospitals of this city, and for five years its reports have been monotonous repetitions of complaints of bad construction, bad ventilation, bad drainage, lax discipline, poor food, and insufficient supplies ; while according to these same reports, the officials with whom the visitors have dealt, have been uniformly courteous and obliging, and ready to listen to all useful suggestions.

"Among the reforms most needed are, first, the proper distribution of food, linen, drugs, etc."

* * * * *

On the 22d day of March 1877, the Grand Jury of the Court of General Sessions visited, by a committee, several of the institutions under the charge of the department of Public Charities and Correction, and in their presentment, the following statement is made in regard to this hospital :

"Bellevue Hospital is in a most deplorable condition. The wards are simply overcrowded, and the atmosphere in them is stifling. * * * * A visit to the cellars disclosed the same unwholesome atmosphere, where the soil pipes were leaking and emitting an insupportable stench."

The New York County Visiting Committee composed of official visitors appointed by the State Board of Charities speak as follows in their report dated June 4th 1877, concerning Bellevue Hospital :

* * * "We would especially call your attention to the position and condition of the cells in Bellevue.

"These cells are for the temporary confinement of trou-

blesome, noisy or lunatic patients of both sexes; they occupy the ground floor of two extensions in the rear of the main building. There being but six cells for each sex, it is often necessary to place two lunatics in one cell. In the part assigned to males, there is no provision made for giving a bath to the filthy creatures sometimes brought in from the streets, and the orderly must resort to such cleansing processes as he can command, to render them fit for the physician to examine. There is a bath-tub in the dark closet in the cells for women, but it is so inconveniently placed, that it is seldom used. Attention has often been called to the unfitness of these cells for their present use."

CHARITY HOSPITAL, BLACKWELL'S ISLAND.

This hospital contains among its other patients, one class very difficult to deal with, those suffering from venereal disease. They are often not ill enough to be confined to their beds, and are very insubordinate and troublesome; and yet there is no system by which they can be brought under discipline.

There are also many prisoners from the work-house, and a few from the penitentiary, employed in the building; and these persons, men and women, are to be seen in the yards, associating with such patients, men, women, or children as are able to be out of the wards. The number of prisoners from the work-house so employed on August 23d 1877, was one hundred and nineteen. Considering the character of many of the patients, the freedom of association and the idleness must have a very bad effect, especially on the young.

To a respectable poor person, obliged by illness to enter Charity Hospital, no trial could be greater than this forced companionship with the vicious and degraded.

Prisoners from the work-house are also sent into the wards, to be treated when suffering from contusions, etc.

The following is an extract from the fifth annual report of the Visiting Committee dated January 1877 :

* * * " In the ophthalmic ward in Charity Hospital, one clean towel a day is given for the whole ward ; in the ward for skin diseases, one clean sheet weekly is allowed per bed ; while in the gangrene and erysipelas pavilion the orderly has a stock of *seven towels* for the use of his patients."

The following statement is made in the report of the chief of staff of Charity Hospital to the Commissioners, January 1877 :

* * * " The necessity of putting three patients in two adjoining beds constantly arises to a great extent. In a sanitary point of view this course is very objectionable, particularly in some wards where diseases are expressed on the surface of the body. It is also an impediment to rapid cure, as in many instances rest and sound sleep are of the greatest importance, which boon is, however, not attainable by the want of sleeping room."

In the presentment of the Grand Jury (March 1877), before referred to, occur the following statements in regard to Charity Hospital :

" At the Island the first place inspected was the small out-building, at present used for erysipelas patients. The building has a generally dilapidated appearance and is improperly ventilated, or rather is not ventilated at all ; the boards with iron bars attached for that purpose are inadequate.

* * * * *

" The baths adjoining these wards and in fact those throughout both hospitals were found to be of iron and to be both black and rusty and entirely unfit for use ; as they now are, they may be a means of spreading instead of checking disease."

The State Board Visiting Committee report as follows in regard to this hospital in June, 1877 :

* * * " The entire domestic regime of the hospital

shows the want of a thorough matron with capable assistants. The utter lack of system in the linen and laundry department is deplorable. The distribution of the linen is left to requisitions made in a hap-hazard way."

One marked defect in Charity Hospital, and also in all the other institutions of the department, is the poor cooking, due to the want of competent paid cooks. The complaint is frequently made that the patients cannot eat the food given them because it is so badly cooked. In Charity Hospital also the kitchen is much too small.

ALMS HOUSE, BLACKWELL'S ISLAND.

The Alms House consists of two institutions, one for men and one for women, under one management.

The inmates, numbering over twelve hundred, are composed of various classes of the old and infirm, blind persons, imbeciles, epileptics, and others incapable of caring for themselves; many of them having destroyed their mental and physical health by excesses.

The Superintendent, who has charge of this large number of persons, receives \$1,500 a year, and to assist him he has one matron, one assistant matron, one foreman, one cook, six orderlies, and three nurses. At almost any part of the day, men are to be seen around the women's building and *vice versa*. In the women's department, work-house prisoners are employed and sleep in the wards with the inmates, eat at the same table with them, and sometimes occasion much trouble, using violence and bad language.

Scurvy made its appearance during the winter in this institution.

The Superintendent in his report to the Commissioners, dated February 22d 1877, says:

"The number of standing beds in the male and female wings being ten hundred and eighty-two, we are forced to have beds on the floors all the year round, the number

of floor beds in the winter months sometimes reaching three hundred."

WORK HOUSE, BLACKWELL'S ISLAND.

This institution is called a work-house, and the prisoners are committed for various offences, drunkenness, vagrancy, disorderly conduct, or because they are homeless.

Many improvements have been made during the year, but much remains to be done.

There are two methods by means of either of which the work-house might be instrumental in diminishing crime. If the discipline were very strict and hard labor were enforced, many of the inmates might prefer to earn an honest living outside; or were the inmates taught to control themselves and to work well and efficiently, a certain number might be reformed. Neither course, however, is pursued. With only seven keepers and four matrons no real discipline is possible, and the hours of work are so short and such slackness in working, especially with the men, is allowed, that the labor can have no deterrent effect. The proof of the utter failure of the work-house to diminish crime is the fact that most of the prisoners have been there at intervals for years, that several are committed twenty or thirty times every year, and that some of them have spent the greater part of their lives within its walls. There is no attempt even at classification; boys of sixteen are confined at night for twelve hours in the same cells with old depraved offenders; young girls committed for the first time are put into cells with prostitutes and drunkards. There can be no real industrial training from lack of a sufficient number of officers.

It is a sad fact that all the chances to learn evil afforded by depraved company in the streets of New York, are concentrated in the work-house and no efforts made to counteract them.

Owing to an insufficient supply of vegetables during the

past winter, there were at least two cases of scurvy in the institution. The sufferers were old women, who had each been committed to the work-house because of their homelessness and they had each been there several months when they were attacked.

From the work-house comes all the "help" employed in the other institutions.

On August 23d, 1877, there were transferred :

Bellevue Hospital,.....	47
Charity Hospital,.....	119
Randall's Island Hospital,.....	70
" " Farm,.....	11
Alms House,.....	34
Lunatic Asylum B. I.,.....	35
Insane Asylum W. I.,.....	85
Infants Hospital W. I.,.....	58
Homeopathic Hospital,.....	64
Total	523

Almost all these persons are committed only for ten days, an order having been issued by the Commissioners that no one committed for a longer period should be transferred. There is thus a constant changing about. Prisoners are first sent to the workhouse, then transferred to one of the other institutions, then sent back to the workhouse to be discharged. The reason given for the order is that the chances of escape from the other institutions are so many that prisoners committed for longer terms cannot be trusted. The amount of labor and care entailed on the officers who have to oversee these men and women and force them to work can be imagined.

LUNATIC ASYLUM, BLACKWELL'S ISLAND.

This Asylum, the largest in the state, contains over fourteen hundred female patients, and the Superintendent, the only paid medical officer, receives \$1800 a year. There

are, besides the Superintendant and Chaplain, sixty-eight paid employees and the amount paid for salaries is \$18,250, while the amount paid for salaries in the penitentiary, where there are nine hundred and forty-two inmates, is \$43,008.

At the Willard Asylum, where only chronic cases are treated, there were in November, 1876, eleven hundred and seventy patients, and the amount paid for house wages for that year was \$42,801.

The following extracts from the report of the Superintendent made to the Commissioners of Public Charities and Correction, and dated January 1st, 1877, together with extracts from the presentment of the Grand Jury (March, 1877), and extracts from reports of visitors appointed by the State Board of Charities sufficiently describe the Asylum.

From the Annual Report of the Resident Physician of the New York City Lunatic Asylum, January 1st, 1877.

* * * "The Institution is still much below the average standard of excellence in the provision made for the care and cure of its unfortunate inmates. * * * * * The Lodge, in which the most excited, noisy and violent of the patients are domiciled, was built for the accommodation of only sixty-six patients of this class; and it is very poorly adapted as a domicile for even this number. It is necessary to place no less than one hundred and fifty patients within its walls. By day they annoy and excite each other; and at night a single noisy patient disturbs many others and may disturb all the rest. During the nights of the 1st, 15th, and 30th of November, which have been selected at random for illustration, there was only a single half hour of quietude within the building. At all other hours noise enough was made by one or more patients to disturb the rest of others.

"Of the two hundred and twenty-six patients at the Re-

treat, no less than one hundred sleep on beds made up on the floor in the corridors.

“Of the four hundred and sixteen patients in the main building one hundred and eighty-six sleep on beds made up on the floor.

“The pavilions, which are the least crowded of all the asylum buildings, contain fifty-one patients more than their estimated capacity.

“With proper accommodations for only nine hundred and twenty-six patients, the institution actually contains one thousand three hundred and forty, exclusive of those who are away on leave of absence.

“It is unnecessary in this connection to expatiate on the evils attending this state of affairs. It is enough to say that it would be an inhumanity to crowd persons who are not deprived of the use of their reason together in this wholesale manner. And yet the helpless insane are thus crowded together. The result is that their chances for recovery are diminished; those who are incurable become stupid through neglect and those who are excited and noisy disturb each other until the excited wards sometimes become a veritable bedlam. The most extreme and constant vigilance in sanitary measures is required to preserve the general health. If this vigilance were relaxed for a few weeks only, a frightful epidemic would surely ensue. Even with such vigilance a fatal epidemic is at any time liable to occur.

* * * * *

“It should not be forgotten that the majority of our patients do not belong to the pauper class. Eighty-two per cent of the patients admitted to this asylum during the year 1875, and about the same per centage of those admitted during the year 1876, were not paupers within any proper meaning of the term. They had never been a public burden previous to the accession of their insanity, and

there is no reason to suppose that they would ever have been such a burden but for their insanity.

* * * * *

“Instead of the low rate of expenditure at our city asylums being commendatory, it is a source of positive and universal reproach on the part of those who are acquainted with the facts and know anything of what the proper care of the insane should be. The mere statement of the *per capita* of expenditure is sufficient to convince them that our patients do not get all they ought to have, whether of food, of clothing, of domiciliary space, of attendance, or of all these requirements together.

* * * “On the recommendation of the medical superintendent, the number allowed on the staff of assistant physicians was increased to five in the month of June. This number is none too large for an efficient service. Unfortunately, it not unfrequently happens that vacancies occur in the staff of assistants at periods of the year when it is impossible to supply their places with eligible men, so that the service often suffers from this cause. If a moderate stipend were paid for the services of assistants the institution would be much the gainer.”

Presentment of the Grand Jury. March 1877.

FEMALE LUNATIC ASYLUM.

“Every ward was overcrowded, especially in the lodge containing one hundred and fifty of the worst cases. There the rooms were very overcrowded, and in one hall, two nurses only were assigned to ninety insane women, the number being far too small for the requirements of the case.

“On inquiry we learned that there was a total number of one thousand four hundred patients, with but one resident physician, whose staff of assistants and nurses was totally inadequate to the needs of so large a number.

"The small proportion of nurses, as well as the limited grounds attached to the building, makes it impossible for the patients to obtain the open air and exercise so necessary for their well-being.

"This institution is now carried on at the expense of \$1.66 per week for each patient. The usual estimate of the cost of such an asylum is \$3, or \$3.50 per week. These estimates include food, clothing, fuel, wages and salaries.

"We believe that the authorities are doing all that they can with the limited allowance at their command, and we urgently recommend that a larger appropriation be made."

Report of State Board Visitor. June 4, 1877.

FEMALE LUNATIC ASYLUM.

* * * "The general condition of the institution remains much as heretofore, except that it is more crowded than ever. The number of inmates on May 24th was fourteen hundred forty-five (1445). In the retreat at that date, there were eighty-four (84) patients on the first floor and twenty-two bedrooms. At night, the most excited cases occupy the rooms singly; the rest sleep on the floor of the hall outside. Two hundred and fifty (250) patients are now crowded into this building, which was built to receive sixty-six. * * * There seems no attempt to make the meals comfortable. The food is hastily dipped out into pans, and carelessly and untidily eaten; and the women are not more than ten or fifteen minutes at the table. •

"While the asylum continues to be so greatly overcrowded, and while the attendants are insufficient in numbers and inferior in quality, we cannot hope for any material improvement.

"An attempt has been made to induce the Commissioners

of Charities to send a trained nurse to the sick hall of the asylum. There are often very serious cases of illness and the nurses of hall 1 (the sick hall) are not among the best in the institution; and there are usually only two of them in charge of more than forty patients, eight or ten of whom are confined to their beds.

“The whole system of appointing nurses is wrong. The appointments are made without any test of qualifications, and the Superintendent, we understand, has no power of removal. Nothing could more utterly destroy discipline.”

All the institutions above described, with the exception of Bellevue Hospital, are situated on Blackwell's Island; on which is also the penitentiary with over nine hundred inmates.

There are therefore on this comparatively small island five large institutions, containing nearly six thousand persons, or the population of a good sized town. The members of this community are drawn from the most unfortunate and most vicious of the population of New York City and comprise men and women whose health is broken down by debauchery of every description; criminals of all grades, from pickpockets of fourteen years, to prisoners committed for murderous assaults; lunatics, some from respectable homes, some from the lowest dens of the city, and every other class of unhappy human beings. For the government of this town and its miserable inhabitants, there is no provision on the island itself. Each institution is absolutely independent of all the rest; and the impression produced on the casual visitor is that there is very little order or system, an impression deepened by more thorough acquaintance with the institutions.

The only pretense of any general government of the island, consists in the visits of the Commissioners of Public Charities and Correction. These visits are usually made

every day by the President and occasionally by other members of the board. It is to be remembered, however, that there are three other islands as well as the prisons of the city to be visited and managed by the Commissioners.

All the buildings are overcrowded, and in none (except the penitentiary) is there a sufficient number of paid officers, nor are the salaries usually sufficient to secure a proper class of officers.

Every institution is kept in a low moral condition by the presence of work-house helpers, who have to be indulged in order to get them to work and who associate quite freely with all the other inmates.

In two institutions at least, scurvy has been developed within the past six months, owing to want of proper food.

In Charity Hospital, the penitentiary and the work-house, there are often young girls and boys exposed to all the degrading and contaminating effects of association with drunkards, prostitutes and criminals, and growing up to take their places as burdens on the community.

HOMEOPATHIC HOSPITAL, WARD'S ISLAND.

In the report of the chief of staff of this hospital to the Commissioners, dated January, 1877, occur the following remarks :

“In the matter of promoting cleanliness in a hospital, it is patent to every mind, that in order to accomplish the end in view, there is required, first of all, such laborers as will perform their duties with patient perseverance and with scrupulous neatness. Under the present arrangement, the menial service of scrubbing the floors, cleaning the wood-work, and attending to the bath-rooms, wash-rooms and water closets is performed by women detailed from the work-house. The demoralizing influence of these minor criminals, when thrown promiscuously among the sick and their attendants has already been brought to

your notice, and the disastrous effects of such evil communications have been vividly portrayed by those having charge of similar institutions in this department. * * * * It is in our wards for the sick that we need quiet, tractable laborers who will perform the work of cleaning the wards without introducing the element of discord, insubordination, shiftlessness and profligacy. Nothing can be more incongruous and inharmonious than the employment of criminal labor in hospital wards, where the sick and suffering are brought into daily and hourly contact with coarse, brutal and drunken outcasts from the streets and brothels of the city."

INSANE ASYLUM, WARD'S ISLAND.

This institution, intended exclusively for men, contained according to the official census in January, 1877, seven hundred and sixty-three inmates.

Nothing beyond extracts from the reports of the Medical Superintendent is required in regard to this asylum.

From annual report of Medical Superintendent. January 1st, 1876.

"In my last annual report I referred, at some length, to the difficulties under which we labored from the want of a satisfactory corps of attendants. These difficulties have met no abatement during the year that has elapsed since that report was presented. Of the importance to the well being and success of an institution of a well organized and trained staff of attendants, there can be no question. * * * * *

"Next to the mental and bodily qualifications which fit a man for the post, the essential requisite for a thoroughly reliable and competent attendant is, perhaps, length of service. Attendance upon the insane—proper attendance—is a duty which cannot be taken up at a moment's notice by men who have spent their lives in other pursuits. It

is a delicate and difficult task, aptitude for which is found only in the few, and proficiency in which can come to none save after prolonged and faithful practice. Attendants are not *keepers*, whose duty is only to guard their patients, but *nurses*, who have to do with those suffering from disease. Hence an attendant can approach a fair degree of usefulness only after a lengthened service, after he has learned not only all the details of his office in relation to the care of the insane generally, but also the names and the peculiarities of the special patients in his ward. In this respect, our staff of attendants fails at once and conspicuously, for there are in the asylum now but two attendants, whose appointments antedate the commencement of the year. There is constant changing, enough in itself to create confusion and seriously to embarrass the working of the institution. During the year that has just closed there have been sixty changes in the list of attendants and the confusion and embarrassment will be further accounted for when we examine the causes leading to these changes. Of the sixty attendants who retired from the institution, twenty-one did so through resignation, and thirty-eight by dismissal. * * * * Regarding the latter I may here say that sixteen were dismissed for intoxication, or bringing liquor into the building, five for striking patients, and the remainder for various infringements of rules. This will show in itself of what class the larger number of those seeking and procuring appointments to the places are. The remedy for this, in my opinion, is to be sought in two ways, both of them dependent upon an increase in the expenditures of the institution and therefore for the present, at least, beyond the power of your board to apply them. In the first place, there should be an increase in the number of attendants; and in the second place, an increase in the rate of compensation allowed them. * * * *

“As I said last year, an increase in the attendants’ wages sufficient to make them a temptation to men who might through political influences obtain the positions with no idea of properly performing their duties, would be unwise. But a moderate increase, falling short of this end, would be desirable. * * * *

“A standing obstacle in the way of the proper conduct of this institution is the employment of a number of prisoners, male and female, to do most of its work. This is an unfortunate result of the association of charitable and correctional institutions, and brings into more or less close contact with the inmates of the former, men and women of the most depraved and worthless class in the city. * * * * The presence of these people in the asylum has a constantly and powerfully depreciating effect upon its tone and discipline; and under a new regulation, practically limiting the class of prisoners sent here to those under sentences of but ten days, there is a constant change going on which prevents any successful endeavor to enforce order and propriety of conduct.”

From report of Medical Superintendent, January 1, 1877.

“There has been some progress made during the year in increasing the efficiency of the corps of attendants. It has been enlarged by the appointment of eight men over the quota of a year since, so that we have now one attendant to seventeen patients; and of late there has been some little improvement in the class of men seeking and procuring appointments. But, with all this, there is still much to be desired. In the first place, despite the increase alluded to, the force must still be considered inadequate. Nominally we have, as I have said, one attendant to every seventeen patients, but practically the proportion is much less, for every day, upon an average, four attendants are not available for duty, through absence upon leave or sickness, or some such cause; and despite the

improvement in their character which I have acknowledged, there is still much to be desired in that regard also. A glance at the records of dismissals of attendants during the year, with the causes therefor, will show at once that there has been something lacking. Apart from twenty-two who have resigned their positions, thirty-six have been dismissed for cause. The number of changes thus entailed in a single year, would of itself be enough to seriously embarrass the discipline and order of an institution; and it will be readily imagined that further embarrassment must arise from the influence of causes leading to their dismissal. The offence of thirteen of the attendants dismissed was intoxication; of six, ill usage of patients, and of the remaining seventeen various other infractions of rules. In one instance, the dismissal of an attendant for striking a patient, was followed by his arrest, and subsequent sentence to an imprisonment in the penitentiary for three months.

"I am aware that any recommendations as to the improvement in the staff of attendants, that I may make to your Board are more than likely to fail of being carried out, through no want of recognition upon your part of their necessity, or indisposition to fulfill them, but owing to the inadequate appropriations that have been made for the maintenance of the department. I am fully aware that the meagre wages (\$20 a month) which you are able now to pay attendants, and which there is strong reason to believe you will be compelled to still further reduce, is in itself a weighty obstacle in the way of improvement. But I believe it to be my duty to lay before you — and so enable you to lay before others with whom the power to adequately provide for the insane, and hence the responsibility for the failure to do so, alike rest — in plain words, the deficiencies which are daily apparent to me here, and the measures which I believe necessary for their removal.

“In the first place, then I believe that at least fifteen attendants should be added to the number already employed. In the larger wards, where seventy-five or eighty patients are confined, we have now but three attendants; and when we allow for absence from duty for some of the causes named, and for temporary absence from the ward, at meal times, and upon other necessary occasions, we shall find that the greater part of the day, this large number of patients is left to the care of but two attendants. * * * * Then there should be an attendant for night-duty in each ward, or at least in every two connecting wards. As it is, after the day attendants retire, the entire building (with the exception of the hospital-ward, where there is a night-nurse), is left in charge of two watchmen, who cannot patrol all the wards with any degree of thoroughness in less than an hour. Hence sickness or disturbance among the patients in any one part of the building, may be quite unknown to the watchman, who may be performing duty in another. With the appointment and disposition of attendants which I recommend, prompt attention would be given to every patient needing it, and prompt interference insured in case of any disturbance, or act of violence or attempt at suicide.

* * * * *

“But after all, the main thing is to secure proper material, out of which to manufacture attendants. Very few of any given number of men are fit to be attendants at all, and these few must be secured, or all efforts will fail. Men who are too old to be active are of no use, and boys who have no steadiness are equally of no use. It is absurd to put a man who is uncleanly in his own person in a position where one of his chief duties is to secure scrupulous cleanliness in others. Men who are addicted to the use of liquor, who are profane or obscene in language, who are ill-tempered or wanting in courage or self-control, can

never be made good attendants. In short, attendants should be selected solely with regard to their fitness from natural disposition and good character, and not with reference to any other recommendations; and, in order that suitable men may present themselves for selection, a fair amount of remuneration must be offered.

* * * "As no addition has been made to the capacity of the building during the year, it follows that what has been said in former reports of its overcrowded condition, is more than ever true. This is a very serious drawback to the success of the institution, and a source of constant danger to its inmates. The sum asked for by your board, in order to erect a new wing, and so relieve this overcrowding, has been refused by the Board of Apportionment and a much smaller one substituted, insufficient to procure more than the making of the necessary excavations, and the erection of the foundations."

RANDALL'S ISLAND.

On the part of this small island which belongs to the city of New York, there is a very large number of institutions containing various classes of inmates.

1st. A branch of the penitentiary, where prisoners from the penitentiary and from the work-house, employed on the farm, are lodged.

2d. The Infant Hospital, which contains four hundred and sixty-five inmates, women with their children and work-house women employed in the building.

3d. The Idiot Asylum school.

4th. Hospital for girls.

5th. Hospital for boys.

6th. Asylum for incurable idiot boys and men.

7th. Asylum for incurable idiot girls. (In these last five buildings there are four hundred and ninety-five inmates.)

8th. A hospital for women to which patients from Charity Hospital are sent.

9th. A hospital for men, to which patients from Charity Hospital are sent.

10th. A public school building, in the attic of which the work-house women employed in all the institutions (except the Infants' Hospital) sleep.

11th. A building to which have lately been sent seventy-five insane men from the asylum at Ward's Island.

The medical officer, who is superintendent of these various institutions, so far as they have any, receives \$1,200 a year.

The large number of children in Randall's Island, renders the presence of so many persons of bad or doubtful character, and of infirm mind a great misfortune, especially so, because heretofore there has been no proper supervision of them.

As an example of the laxity of supervision the following facts are suggestive. An idiot woman employed in the kitchen of the asylum school was found to be enciente. The matron and head teacher of the school believed that the father of her child was one of the work-house prisoners, but the President of the Board of Commissioners of Public Charities and Correction expressed it as his conviction, that one of the idiot pupils was the father.

Randall's Island is in fact being used to receive the overflow from all the other institutions. The various classes of patients are sent from Blackwell's and Ward's Islands, under the charge of underpaid employees, with no responsible person to superintend them. The Medical Superintendent is nominally held responsible for their well-being; but as there are about twelve hundred persons in all, sick, insane, idiots, prisoners and children, and as they are scattered through eleven different institutions under the care of persons not responsible to him, and whom he

cannot discharge — it is difficult to imagine an office of more responsibility or less power.

HART'S ISLAND.

This island, beautifully situated and affording great advantages, is, unfortunately, becoming a second Randall's Island, and is used to receive the surplus from other institutions. All the buildings on the island are barracks, and could be used to classify the inmates, but no such attempt is made. There are now about three hundred patients in the Hart's Island hospital, under the charge of one physician, who receives \$1200 a year, and who has under him, one watchman, one cook, three orderlies, one chief nurse and four nurses. The expense for salaries is \$3,360 for these eleven persons including the physician.

There are also about twenty-five work-house women who help in the wards, etc., but the physician has no matron, no steward, and no assistant physician to share his duties.

Within the past three months about seventy-five insane women have been sent from Blackwell's Island, and lodged in the barracks at the opposite end from the hospital. A few nurses accompany them.

The barracks used for the insane women are some of those which have been occupied by the work-house prisoners transferred from Blackwell's Island, sometimes to the number of four hundred. The warden and keepers kept them all employed on improvements, which are being made on the island, and as many as five hundred men might be constantly at work there, but within a few months, the number transferred has much diminished, and there were in August, 1877, only about two hundred.

CONCLUSION.

In reviewing what we have said of the various charitable institutions, under the charge of the department of Public Charities and Correction of the city of New York, there are several of the evils which disgrace them that may be attributed to the want of appropriations large enough to carry on these institutions. Among these evils may be classed the overcrowding, due to buildings which are far too few for the number of persons to be cared for, insufficient food, lack of a proper number of attendants for the sick and insane, and of keepers for the work-house prisoners, etc., etc.

All these evils would appear to be enough to condemn any city which so provided for those dependent upon her—but beyond all these, and serving to aggravate each one, and making it impossible to improve the condition of these institutions, even if sufficient money were appropriated for their support, lies the great fundamental evil of the system by which they are governed. There is no responsible head to any one of these hospitals or asylums; no superintendent who has authority to issue orders and to punish his subordinates if they are disregarded; no superintendent who can justly be held responsible for the wrong doing of those under him, or for the condition of the institution supposed to be under his charge. Every employee in the department, from the superintendents down to the cooks, holds his position on exactly the same ground, and from exactly the same power. No one can be removed except by this power, and the following extracts from a report made to the Commissioners by one of their superintendents, and printed by them in 1875, will show what their practice has been in regard to removals.

* * * “Those (attendants) who willfully disobey rules

or orders, should secure thereby invariable and immediate dismissal.

“This would seem to be so much a matter of course that any mention of it may appear superfluous, but, unfortunately the practice has not been so strict in that respect as could be wished. I can conceive of no greater misconduct than deliberate cruelty to an insane person, and surely intoxication while upon duty gains added gravity from the fact that such duty is performed in the wards of a lunatic asylum, and yet flagrant instances of each offence have been overlooked, or the offender has been allowed to resign under charges, and in the course of a short time has been reappointed. The effect of such instances upon the discipline of an institution and upon the authority of its officers must of necessity be disastrous. I believe it to be essential not only that dismissal should promptly follow grave offence, but that such dismissal should be fully and fairly understood to be final. The reappointment of a man once dismissed lessens the respect of all his associates for the rules of an institution, and one such instance will beget many future violations.”

Under such a system it is inevitable that the subordinates in the various institutions, instead of looking to the superintendent for orders and for approval, should regard the Commissioners as their immediate superiors, and unfortunately some of the Commissioners at least regard themselves in the same light.

The following letter addressed to the Commissioners on the 24th of April, 1877, explains our views upon this subject.

*"To the Commissioners of Public Charities and Correction,
New York City.*

"GENTLEMEN:

"You are doubtless as painfully aware as it is possible for any one to be of the incompetency and of the graver moral deficiencies of many of the subordinates who have been appointed to fill places in the charitable institutions under your charge. The more thoroughly we become acquainted with the management of these institutions, the more firmly are we convinced that under the present system of making appointments, an efficient and proper administration of them is impossible. So long as political pressure is allowed to have weight with you in the choice of employees, so long will the charitable institutions of the city be badly managed.

"As one means of remedying the evil and introducing a better discipline, we would suggest to you that in each institution, the superintendent should have full power to appoint and remove his subordinates, and that he should be held to a strict accountability in regard to them and should be responsible for the absolutely good management of the institution under his charge. If you would choose and appoint your superintendents without regard to their political opinions or influence, and with a view to their assuming such a responsibility as we suggest, we believe that a great change for the better could be made in the department.

"Respectfully, etc.,

(Signed.) "THEODORE ROOSEVELT,

"JOSEPHINE SHAW LOWELL,

Com'rs, etc."

The conclusions of the "Visiting Committee for Bellevue and Other Public Hospitals" after five years' experience are thus expressed in their *Fifth Annual Report*:

“The administration of the Department of Public Charities and Corrections has properly nothing to do with politics; yet, * * * there is not an appointment, from that of the Commissioner to the lowest subordinate, which may not have a political significance: and while this system lasts, the results must be the same. By this we do not mean to imply that the appointments are all necessarily bad. On the contrary, some are very good; but they are good in spite of the system, not in consequence of it. The Commissioners are daily and hourly hampered by political considerations which ought never to enter into their deliberations.

“If the Commissioners themselves were appointed irrespective of political opinions, and removed only for cause, they would be free to establish that system of administration which their experience should prove to be for the best interest of the people under their charge. They would then be able to train a body of subordinates, chosen with reference to their fitness, who, knowing that they were appointed during good behavior, would be ambitious to do their best; and thus in a few years we should have the Public Charities administered wisely and justly.”

In the hands of the Commissioners of Public Charities and Corrections is placed an enormous responsibility. They have under their charge almost ten thousand human beings, whose moral welfare, as well as physical health, depends upon them.

Should they so govern these unfortunates, that their evil propensities would be checked, and all the good that is in them encouraged and strengthened, many could be saved. In the penitentiary alone, there are three hundred and twenty-one young men under twenty years of age, associating with criminals old in years and wickedness.

In every institution under the charge of the department

the comparatively innocent are forced into companionship with the low and depraved, they have no encouragement to goodness—in many instances, the very persons set over them, to contról them, are themselves low and vicious. In fact, generation after generation is being bred up to pauperism and crime, until, in time, we shall be cursed with ten times ten thousand paupers and criminals; their lives a burden and curse to themselves and to their fellow-men. It is not a question of a few thousand dollars, saved this year or next year—it is a question of thousands of souls degraded and tainted with every form of vice, and this in the public institutions of the city of New York, and under the control of her officials.

Oct. 20th, 1877.

(Signed) THEODORE ROOSEVELT,
JOSEPHINE SHAW LOWELL,
EDWARD C. DONNELLY,

Com'rs of the State Board of Charities.

